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Come back, Tanya

FILE ONLY

Those Soviets are playing dirty now

By Donald Kimelman
Inquirer Editorial Board

It was bad enough that he out-flanked our President in Iceland, bad enough that he got his spy back and made Nick Daniloff rich. But this time Mikhail Gorbachev, that slick operator in the Kremlin, has gone too far.

No one's quibbling with his giving the old heave-ho to 10 American diplomats last week. He could have expelled 20 and only the Finns who supply the commissary would have suffered. But kicking all the Soviets out of the U.S. Embassy was the dirtiest commie trick since Fidel Castro deeded over the contents of the Mar-iel prison.

What's the State Department supposed to do now? Get down on its knees and beg to have its maids, drivers, car mechanics, janitors, bureaucracy massagers and hamburger flippers returned? How can the diplomats who run that embassy ever explain to Sen. Jesse Helms and Co. that they need those Soviet workers, those KGB plants, more than they need a lot of their own people?

Who's going to drive the pale blue buses that take the kids from the compounds to and from the Anglo-American school every day? Who's going to fix those old buses when they break down? How is the snack bar going to function without little, sharp-tongued Tanya to keep the orders moving and big, buxom Tanya to brew the capuccinos? How is the ambassador going to keep throwing those elegant soirees without cooks in the kitchen and maids in black dresses and white aprons to serve the food?

Sure, they'll make out fine for a few days. It's kind of an adventure for the ambassador to drive himself to work or his wife to whip up dinner for 200 while the Marines do the dishes. But what happens the next time the embassy wants its people to rub shoulders with the Soviet litera-ti?

Who is going to prepare all those hand-written invitations in Russian and who is going to deliver each one individually to keep them from disappearing in the Soviet mail? And when the agricultural attache wants to have a look at the winter wheat, who is going to make all the travel arrangements and stand in line to get the tickets?

Oh he's a sly one all right, that Gorbachev. He knows that when the diplomatic pouch arrives and goes out twice a week, red-blooded Soviet workers tote those huge canvas bundles — 100 in a single shipment — while the American couriers demurely stand by to make sure nothing disappears. He knows that the tons of milk and fresh vegetables those finicky Americans ship in from Helsinki each week are steered through customs and delivered to the commissary door by those same oft-maligned Soviet employees.

And just wait until the next congressional delegation arrives and demands tickets to the Bolshoi Ballet. Then they'll see what life is like without that woman, that suspected lieutenant colonel in the KGB, who was a virtuoso when it came to pulling strings at the Bolshoi box office. Now the dirty little secret is out.

The Americans in Moscow loved their Soviet workers, and, to tell the truth, the Soviets loved them, too. You should have seen the tears that were shed when the Soviet authorities forbade their people from attending the embassy Christmas party in 1983 or the joy the following year when the ban was lifted and the sons and daughters of atheists once more could pose for photos on Santa's knee.

Maybe the embassy was a little too casual about security a few years back, but all those problems had been corrected. It may have sounded odd that the ambassador had a KGB driver, but that sure beats an ideologically impeccable CIA driver who can't find his way around the city.

There's no way around it. The President's got to take a hard line. Either Gorbachev gives us our Soviets back or we insist the Kremlin replace all those shadowy "technicians" in its Washington embassy with American union labor.

(Donald Kimelman recently returned as chief of The Inquirer's Moscow bureau).